

## EXCERPT FROM “WITH YOU THERE IS LIGHT”

BY ALEXANDRA LEHMANN

*In this scene, Officer Fritz Hartnagel informs Sophie Scholl of atrocities that will make it nearly impossible for Sophie not to help form a principal role in the Munich student resistance group, the White Rose.*

The rat-a-tat-tat of machine gun fire was so short and abrupt that he wasn't sure he heard it until the screaming began. He hadn't seen the black uniforms approach the demonstrators. At first, Fritz couldn't move. His heart pounded. The crowd started screaming and fleeing in all directions. Very slowly, he retreated backwards into his room again and drew the curtains. Strangely, ambulance sirens didn't follow all the shooting. Only a dead silence ensued after the screaming subsided. Then he heard the muffled sounds of someone barking orders in German.

Fritz put his face in his hands and then looked up at the ceiling with his eyes filled with horror. The hotel telephone rang. He didn't answer it. Instead, he made his bed with trembling hands. He was in shock, uncertain of what he had actually seen. Then very slowly, he took out a piece of paper. She was the only one he could tell this to. He had to tell her. No secrets. This is what he expected from her.

*Amsterdam, February 28, 1941*

*Dear Sophie,*

*Amsterdam civilians just demonstrated against recent Jewish arrests. Street cars and many shops went on strike. The SS shot at a group of protestors. They supposedly killed twenty. The people are extremely angry.*

He thanked her for preparing him for this. She was the one who gave him the courage to open his eyes. She was the one who told him that living in denial was worse than not seeing the truth.

It struck him that the censors could read his letter, even though officers' correspondence was automatically exempt, or that is what they had been told. Fritz paused for a moment. Terrified, he thought about the consequences. He had seen how his superiors treated opposition, the “enemies within.” He had to tell her. He knew that not telling her would be worse. It would be like denying to himself what he had just witnessed. She would help him now if she knew. Sophie would know how to help him. Then, suddenly, unable to control himself, he punched the wall. How could he be a part of this?

He would have to go out into this destroyed city, see these murderers—the SS and SA—on patrol on every street corner and look them in the eye. Perhaps even salute them. The sound of machine gun fire repeated over and over in his mind. The screaming. Then the eerie silence that followed.

He held onto the sealed letter tightly and prayed for Sophie to be its only reader. He knew only one thing for sure. He wanted them to get through the war the best they could. At this point, it meant coming out of it alive.